



**Intervention by Ambassador Louise V. Oliver
Permanent Delegate of the United States of America**

**UNESCO Executive Board, Programs and External Relations Commission
April 23, 2004**

**Dakar Framework for Action (Item 3.4.4)
&
United Nations Literacy Decade (Item 3.4.3)**

Background: The Director General reported on the progress achieved in implementation of and follow-up to the Dakar Framework for Action (The World Education Forum in Dakar, April 2000, adopted the "Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments", which commits governments to achieving quality basic education for all by 2015 or earlier, with particular emphasis on girls' education, and includes a pledge from donor countries and institutions that "no country seriously committed to basic education will be thwarted in the achievement of this goal by lack of resources."). The Director General also gave a progress report for 2003-2004 on the United Nations Literacy Decade. The Executive Board considered these items together.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We thank the Director General for the comprehensive review of UNESCO's efforts to implement the goals of Dakar. The Framework for Action breathed new life into the goal of educating all people – and the United States appreciates the enormity of the challenge.

We agree that the success of this endeavor hinges on closer coordination, enhanced strategic planning, and greater engagement of civil society organizations. We also believe that there is much more we can do to build momentum in pursuit of these great goals, create an environment within the House that encourages innovation and initiative, and, most importantly, insist on programs that show measurable results.

In Document 169 EX/10 [Director General's Report on the Dakar Framework], we see that conferences and meetings were held in Beirut, Latin America, Bangkok, New Delhi and Pakistan. We see mention of a Cairo Declaration and early childhood policy briefs. But what we don't see is the rationale for these actions or anticipated results. Conferences and reports have their place. But before every conference or meeting, certain questions should be asked: Who's going to be there? Why were they invited to the meeting and what will they bring to the discussions? What is the program and the purpose? What is the follow up? If a book has been published, who is the audience? How is the book going to be disseminated? How do we know if anyone has read it? How do we know if it has had any impact?

Reasons for meetings and projects should be clearly articulated. The goals should be clear. We do not expect this level of detail in reports from the Secretariat, but we must be confident that these questions have been asked. I raise this issue because the report on the follow-up for the Dakar Framework for Action is filled with reports of numerous programs and activities conducted around the world, which suggest that real progress is being made towards the Dakar goals, and yet, I have spent the past several days listening to many of my distinguished colleagues talk about the failure of these activities and programs to actually achieve serious positive results.

At the end of the day, it's not the next meeting that matters. What matters is how many children we teach to read and write so they can improve their lives and achieve their dreams and avoid becoming part of future statistics on illiteracy and how many more adults, because of our work here, can now provide for their families and live with dignity and purpose.

Everyone in this room knows that the challenge in education could not be more urgent. UNESCO's mandate is very large, and incorporates many worthy areas of activity. But our time, energy, and resources must be focused on this, UNESCO's top priority, with a particular focus on Africa.

I would make many of the same comments on the Decade of Literacy. I was pleased to read in Document 169 EX/9 [Director General's Report on the United Nations Literacy Decade], about the worldwide launch of the Decade of Literacy with numerous high-profile events in various countries designed to create awareness about the importance of this issue. I would also note, with particular pleasure, that in addition to hosting the inaugural ceremonies in New York to announce the establishment of the Decade, the special United States

contribution to UNESCO for 2003 supported an initial meeting on developing the concept of "information literate societies" which was organized in Prague by the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the National Forum on Information Literacy.

As I mentioned earlier, meetings are an important first step. But where is the follow up? Where is the program development that takes advantage of the momentum? How are we planning to monitor and measure results? How will we know if we're getting any closer to our goal of reducing illiteracy worldwide?

In this connection I am concerned by the lack of available reliable data about the developing world as referenced in paragraph 25. Although we are pleased by the launch of UNESCO's Institute of Statistics Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme, are there adequate resources for this program and what is the time frame for the completion of the development of an appropriate methodology for measurement of literacy skills? Without good data, it will be difficult to develop effective results-based programs. We are encouraged by programs such as the one sponsored by the Japan-Funds-In-Trust called "Literacy and Non-Formal Education Development in Afghanistan", known as LAND AFGHAN that has surveyed learner's needs in 400 literacy centers in 32 provinces. LAND AFGHAN is now working hand-in-hand with the Afghan Ministry of Education. We hope that there will be a serious evaluation of that program, as well as follow-up initiatives so that the positive effects of that program – and others like it - will not be lost.

I would therefore like to suggest an addition to the end of paragraph 3 in the proposed draft decision 169 EX/9 which I will offer later. [The amendment proposed by the U.S. is reflected in the Executive Board's decision]

Thank you.